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SUBJECT: UPCOMING LOCAL ELECTIONS VIEWED AS A BAROMETER OF NATIONAL POLITICAL STRENGTH

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Classified By: Political Counselor Mary T. Curtin for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: Poles will vote in municipal and regional elections nationwide on November 12, in what is cast as a referendum on the Kaczynski government, and a barometer of their political strength in the wake of the latest series of domestic political troubles. The race for mayor in Warsaw is the most closely watched, with the greatest similarity to the political polarization at the national level. Elsewhere, regional and municipal elections are more commonly driven by local personalities and issues, with party affiliation playing a lesser role. Poland's Constitutional Court ruled November 3 that the new local election law is constitutional, including "bloc" provisions that will likely help larger political parties, notably the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) After a year of political upheaval that saw Poland's government lurching from crisis to crisis, Poles will vote November 12 in local elections throughout the country. For the ruling Law and Justice (PiS)-led coalition, local elections are viewed as an important barometer for their strength nationwide, particularly in the wake of the latest political eruption, which saw PM Jaroslaw Kaczynski boot out his junior coalition partner, Samoobrona (SO) leader Andrzej Lepper, only to bring him back into his governing coalition four weeks later. As a result of the off-again, on-again political marriage with SO, PiS's political fortunes have dipped. Polls consistently show them trailing the opposition Civic Platform (PO), and many view local elections as a referendum on the Kaczynskis' government.

Warsaw -- the Big Prize

¶3. (U) Not surprising, many are focused on the Warsaw mayoral race, which pits former PM Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz from PiS against former central bank chair Hanna Gronkiewicz-Walz for PO. Marek Borowski trails in a distant third place as the candidate of the united left. Marcinkiewicz still polls as the most popular and most trusted politician in Poland, and as an independent voice within PiS. As such, he does not suffer the negatives attributed to the Kaczynski brothers. However, PO carried Warsaw in last year's elections and Gronkiewicz-Walz maintains a slim lead. Current polls predict that Gronkiewicz-Walz and Marcinkiewicz will move into the runoff election on November 26.

¶4. (C) COMMENT. Moving Marcinkiewicz off the national stage

and over to the Warsaw City Hall was a stroke of political genius by Jarek Kaczynski. If he wins an upset victory in Warsaw, running as independently as he can from the Kaczynskis, it will be trumpeted as a huge success for PiS. If he loses, the Kaczynskis will have sidelined their most serious competition within their party, a win-win in either case. END COMMENT.

Outside of Warsaw -- Local Personalities Trump Parties

¶5. (SBU) Poland remains starkly drawn between urban centers ("Polska A") who voted lopsidedly in favor of PO, and the countryside ("Polska B") who vote by equally disproportionate margins in favor of PiS. However, outside Warsaw mayoral races often have more to do with the reputation of local candidates than with their party affiliation. In Lodz, Poland's second largest city, the odds on favorite for reelection is Jerzy Kropiwnicki, running as an independent. Commonly, local political confederations twin with national parties, resulting in a more independent mix. In Wroclaw, the city council is a model of cooperation between PiS and PO, for instance, despite the sharp divisions of these parties at the national level.

Constitutional Court Judgment on Local Election Law

¶6. (U) On September 7 President Lech Kaczynski signed a new local election law that permits political parties to band together and "bloc" their votes. As a result, PiS is "blocked" with its coalition partners, SO and the League of Polish Families (LPR), which may not individually muster the necessary five percent threshold for representation in regional parliaments (sejmiks). As a result of the changes to the electoral law, a vote for LPR would be counted for PiS owing to their common electoral bloc. PO is similarly affiliated with the Polish Peasant's Party (PSL) in a common

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bloc. The changes benefit larger parties, notably PiS, which has taken a bite out of the core support of its coalition partners. On November 3, Poland's Constitutional Tribunal voted 12-3 that the new electoral law is constitutional.

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